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THE
SOURIS COUNTRY

ITS MONUMENTS, MOUNDS, FORTS AND RIVERS.

—BY—

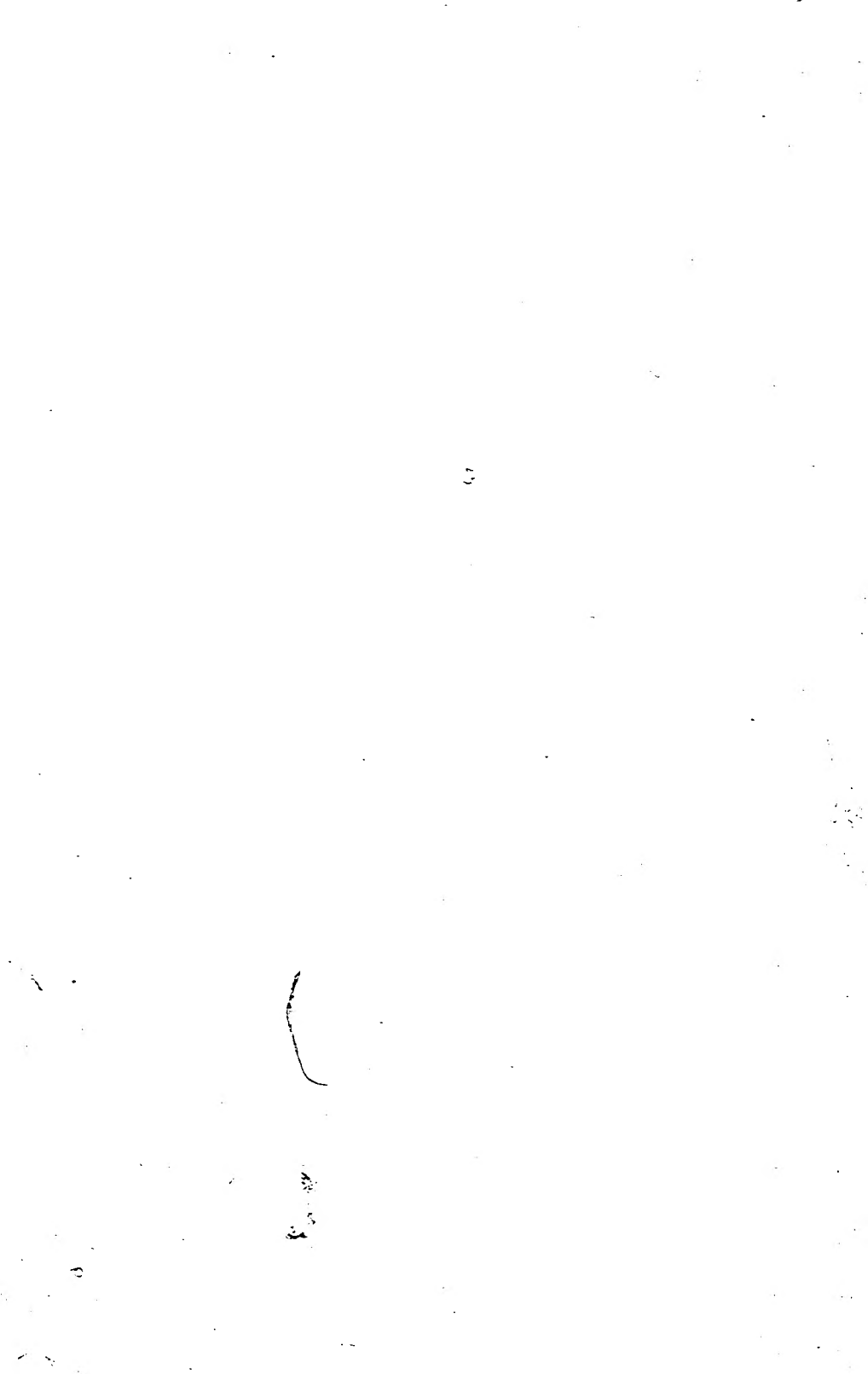
GEORGE BRYCE, LL.D.,

PROFESSOR IN MANITOBA COLLEGE, AND PRESIDENT OF THE HISTORICAL
SOCIETY, WINNIPEG.

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THE SOURIS COUNTRY.

Its Monuments, Mounds, Forts and Rivers.

The following is the inaugural lecture of the winter series before the Historical and Scientific Society of Manitoba, recently delivered by the president, Rev. Dr. Bryce:—

On September 7th, 1886, the writer having pursued his journey by rail south-westward through Manitoba, and driven some forty miles by wagon, arrived by the "Boundary Commission trail" at the crossing of the river Souris, about two hundred and twenty-five miles from the city of Winnipeg. Here seen from the brink of a valley about a mile wide, and at the bottom—one hundred and fifty or two hundred feet below the prairie level—runs the river, skirted at places with its belt of timber. The writer's party descended the steep bank, and as the equipage stood in the midst of the stream—at this season very small and shallow—a troop of mingled thoughts hurried through their minds. Here between these banks passed up, one hundred and forty-four years ago, two brave sons of the intrepid Verandrye, calling the Souris river the St. Pierre, in memory alike of Governor Beauharnois, of Quebec, and of their father, the explorer. By this route they reached, after a short portage, the Missouri, and first of white men, north of Mexico, saw on January 1st, 1743, rise before their wondering gaze the eastern slope of the Rocky Mountains. This river was the pathway of their great discovery. A few miles back upon the trail must have crossed in the year 1797 a party led by Mr. David Thompson, the astronomer and surveyor of the Northwest Fur Company, from the fort at the mouth of the Souris to the Mandan village on the Missouri, and by the same route journeyed also a party carrying a message in six days over the snow-bound prairies in December, 1804, from trader Chaboulliez, at the mouth of the Souris to the celebrated American expedition of Lewis and Clark as they ascended the Missouri to cross the Rocky Mountains to the Pacific. And centuries before, as evidenced by the remains to be

described, here dwelt a numerous population, which fought, and worked, and died, and whose scanty memorials we now have in our possession.

THE COURSE OF THE SOURIS.

The Souris, or Mouse, or St. Pierre river, has a course of some four hundred miles, and may be claimed as a Canadian river, for though crossing the boundary line four times, and having a large portion of its winding career in the Territory of Dakota, in the United States, yet its source is in Wood Mountain on Canadian soil, and its direction, of eighty or more miles after, for the last time, crossing the boundary line is northward, to the point where it empties into the Assiniboine. Along this winding course are natural monuments, artificial fortifications, and mounds, and the ruins of fur traders' forts of very great interest, and they constitute for the work of our society, which I venture to think has been of service, in its eight years' existence, in making known many features of our Northwest, a field with virgin soil. Far up in the course of the Souris at a point about 254 miles west of Red River, and some three and a half miles north of the International boundary, is a most interesting group of rocks standing out on the prairie, long known from the most remarkable of them to the half-breed hunters of the plains as

LA ROCHE PERCEE.

Here at the junction of a small tributary—"Short Creek"—with the Souris river may be seen the fantastic shapes of worn and weather-eaten gray sandstones, having the appearance of ruined shrines. The best known—of which we have a photograph taken by the boundary Commission—resembles the archway of a Pharaonic temple. These vast rocks standing out—a natural Stonehenge—on the open prairie have greatly impressed the Indians, who regard the locality as sacred to the Manitou. Upon the rocks are engraven the totems of many of the redmen who have gone as devotees to

this prairie shrine. Human figures, the horse, the elk, the buffalo, the sturgeon, the teepee, the pelican, and the star are all to be found as commemorative emblems. So great was the fame of this prairie wonder among all Indian tribes that Capt. Palliser's expedition in August, 1857, struck southward from Fort Ellice some seventy or eighty miles across the prairie for the sole purpose of observing the grotesque forms of the "pierced rock." At this part of the Souris on its banks are found the well-known

COAL BEDS

for which for years in the early settlement of the province the Souris was chiefly known. It is a remarkable thing in any land to find exposed on a river bank seams of coal eighteen feet in thickness. These were first described by Dr. George Dawson though others had visited them. A reminiscence comes to us in connection with the Souris coal beds. In 1874, or thereabouts, when the Boundary Commission had led to the coal being well-known, a company of Winnipeg gentlemen agreed to enter on possession of the lands on the Souris. The writer well remembers offers being made of a share in the enterprise, and the land was taken up by a number of gentlemen. It was however on account of the difficulty of development, ultimately abandoned. It was a few years later that the present president of the Hudson's Bay Railway, with a body of men, actually mined a quantity of coal from these beds, and floated it down the Souris in the spring in a barge, but found it of far inferior quality to what we now obtain from the Galt and Saskatchewan mines. Coming down the valley of the Souris to a point some 225 miles west of the Red River, three or four miles from the Souris river and about three north of the boundary I seen the

HILL OF THE MURDERED SCOUT.

The prairie here is very level. At this point is what seems an old river bed similar to what is known further to the east as the "Blind Souris" begins the "Riviere des Lacs," forming a long and very singular lake. The legend of the "Hill of the murdered Scout" is that in the year 1830 the Assiniboines or Stoney Indians were at war with the Sioux. An Assiniboine brave cautiously climbed the hill or butte to spy the Sioux encampment on the other side when he came upon a Sioux warrior lying asleep in his buffalo robe on the summit of the butte. To seize a granite boulder and kill the sleeping enemy was the work of an in-

stant, and in memory of his triumph the victor dug in the gravelly soil the figure of a man stretched at full length upon the ground, and also hollowed out the marks of his own footprints. Lying in the hollow representing the vanquished enemy's head so late as 1873 was still to be seen a red granite stone some eight inches long, with which this much vaunted deed of Indian daring had been accomplished. No sacrilegious hand would remove that stone from its place as a memorial. The Souris river takes its rise and receives a number of its tributaries from the south from a most remarkable chain of elevations on the western prairies known as the

MISSOURI COTEAU.

This continued singular physical feature of the western prairie runs from northwest to southeast, and is from two to three hundred feet high. At the boundary line it is forty-five miles wide, though it seems to mark the escarpment of a western table-land. Wood Mountain, which rises to 3,800 feet above the sea level, is about twenty miles north of the boundary line, and is but a higher elevation of the Missouri coteau. There is in general no rock on this remarkable elevation. It is a mass of drift perhaps marking the margin of some ancient inland sea or lake. The coteau is covered with pointed hillocks, and towards its western side runs into what the French half-breeds call the "Mauvaises terres," or bad lands, which, with their rough and endless succession of dry and treeless hills, ridges, and desert features, an American writer has described as "a tumultuous expanse of baked mud." Yet from this irregular mass of confused terrain streams as tributaries run northward into the Souris, and south into the Missouri. For many miles parallel to this great coteau, the Souris river pursues its course through Dakota. It is on the summit of this coteau, to the south of where the Souris leaves it, that another monument still more famous in the history of the west and of the Indian nations, is found, the

RED PIPESTONE QUARRY.

This is the very centre of Indian poetry and romance. Here is found seemingly the only deposit known of red pipestone, of which almost every American tribe has examples, and of which I present you this evening two specimens from the mounds on the Souris. The writer has found a gray pipestone—a species of steatite on an island in the Lake of the

Woods—from which the Indians of that region make pipes, but it is around the red pipestone that Indian tradition gathers. The first white man to visit the red pipestone quarry on the Missouri Coteau, or “Coteau des prairies,” was the Indian traveller Catlin in 1836. The specimens brought by him were analyzed, and the new mineral “not steatite, harder than gypsum, and softer than carbonate of lime,” a red argillite, similar to that seen forming near Nipigon on the C.P.R. line is called in science Catlinite, in honor of the traveller. On the top of the Coteau of the quarry there is a perpendicular wall of quartz beds—light gray or in some cases of flesh color—twenty-five or thirty feet in elevation and running for nearly two miles from north to south, the surface both of the perpendicular side, and for acres on the top being highly polished and glazed as if by ignition. At the base of this wall for half a mile in width is a level prairie. Near the wall and on the flat lower surface are five enormous boulders of gneiss rock, leaning together and covered over with gray moss, the smallest twelve or fifteen feet in diameter. Under these two holes or ovens are seen. One rock, a portion of the wall, is split off to a distance of some eight feet and is called the “leaping rock.” Being perfectly polished it is a feat of great daring on the part of the young braves to have gained a footing on it, and many lives have been lost in the attempt. The face of the wall is covered by totems and emblems hundreds in number, of those who have visited the sacred spot. It is by digging four or five feet through the soil and loose slaty layers of the prairie surface that the celebrated red pipestone is reached. Here then for ages have been all the elements to make a most holy shrine for the superstitious redmen. For centuries this spot was neutral ground. Here all the Indians met, and before entering in the quarry buried their weapons of war. Amid the terrible cruelties of Indian warfare here was at least one place of sanctuary. The legend of the Sioux, who live nearest the spot is: Many ages ago the Great Spirit invited the tribes to meet him at the “Red pipe.” He stood on the top of the rocks, and the people were assembled before him; he took out of the rocks a piece of the red stone, and made a large pipe; he smoked it over them all; told them it was part of their flesh; that though they were at war they must meet at this place as friends; that the stone belonged to them all; that they must

make calumets from it and smoke them to him; the Spirit then disappeared in the cloud; at the last whiff of his pipe a blaze of fire rolled over the rocks and melted ed their surface; and two Indian women were carried under the “medicine rocks” where they still remain and must be propitiated by those who wish to take any of the pipestone away.” Longfellow in the opening canto of *Hiawatha* has closely followed Catlin’s account of the traditions:

“Down the rivers, ’oer the prairies,
Came the warriors of the nations.
Came the Delawares and Mohawks,
Came the Choctaws and Comanches,
Came the Shoshonies and Blackfeet.
“Came the Pawnees and Omawhaws.”
“Came the Mandans and Sacotahs,
Came the Hurons and Ojibways.
All the warriors drawn together
By the signal of the Peace-pipe,
To the mountains of the prairie,
To the great Red Pipestone Quarry.”

Following now the Seuris in its last crossing over the International boundary the point is reached where, coming from the east, the exploring party in September last arrived, ten miles north of the line. Here is met

THE REGION OF THE ANTILERS

in township 2, range 27 west. Twostreams, North and South Antler creeks, running from the west, winding through deep valleys, empty a little more than two miles apart into the Souris river. The Sioux name for these is He-ka-pa-wa-kpa, or translated, the “Head and Horns Creek,” and certainly the two streams widening apart as they are ascended, have something of the appearance of the antlers of a deer. Here is one of the most beautiful spots in Manitoba. The space between the streams is now closely settled by a thrifty and most intelligent class of Canadian farmers. The settler, the school, and the missionary have here replaced the buffalo of but a few years ago, and the new settlers have, as we shall see, undoubtedly succeeded a considerable population, which many a year ago faded away. “Guarded on three sides by the deep valleys of the Souris and its two tributaries, there can be little doubt that here was a prairie stronghold in the days of aboriginal wars. This leads us to notice first a group of

REMARKABLE EARTHWORKS

which would seem to have served as fortifications on the south side of the South Antler. There have been found on the tributaries of the Missouri lines of earthworks thrown up, earthen redoubts, and mounds in connection with them evidently as look out stations. Lewis and Clark in their “travels to the source of the Mis-

souri" in 1804 give us a carefully traced diagram of such works on the Missouri, and they state that the French interpreters assured them that there are great numbers of these fortresses even as far north as the Jacques river, whose head waters reach well up towards the Souris. In section 15 on the South Antler are four earthworks running from north to south respectively 125, 100, 150, and 75 yards in length and arranged in a sort of echelon. These are each from five to ten yards wide, some three or four feet high and have much the appearance of a railway grade on the prairie. A large amount of labor must have been required to throw them up. On the next section however—section 10—is by far the most remarkable fortification, and very much resembling that figured by Lewis and Clark. Across a bend of the river is a large and wide embankment 280 yards long, running from north to south. At each end of this is a considerable mound. From the southern extremity of this at a distance of ten yards runs another bank of about the same dimensions but 150 yards long, at right angles to the former, and flanked like the other at both ends by mounds. The earthworks are all on the open prairie and arrest the attention of the most unobservant. It will be noticed that these fortifications are, so far as observed on the south side of the South Antler, just in the direction from which an enemy would have come and by the route of attack he would most likely have chosen. The mounds found, whatever other purpose they may have served, were plainly for observation. It has been suggested that these earthworks may have been used for impounding the buffalo, when at times the herd was driven in by riders, and thus many slaughtered, but the arrangement of the embankments does not suggest this object.

The district about the Antlers has however long been celebrated as a

GREAT MOUND REGION.

It is interesting to know that Prof. Hind in 1858, on a point between a stream and the Souris river, near the 49th parallel "found a number of conical mounds and the remains of an intrenchment." An excavation was made in one of the mounds, but the explorer found nothing. The mounds and embankments which have been now described, are those examined by Hind. He even calls what we now know as the South Antler, by the name "Mandan Creek," believing the mounds to have been former Mandan dwellings. This, indeed, was the

halfbreed tradition on Red river as well as in other parts of the Northwest. The late expedition, however, within an area of four miles square in the townships named, surveyed no less than twenty-one mounds, and from accounts of other explorers the mounds continue westward as the ascent of the Antlers is made. The mounds vary from twenty feet in diameter to fifty or sixty, and are at the highest point from four to seven feet high, being almost all flattened cones. They are very much less in size than the mounds opened two years ago on Rainy River, which lie three or four hundred miles to the east of these. The party opened four mounds, and thanks are especially due for assistance rendered, to Messrs. Gould, Elliott and Sheriff, of Sourisford, while Dr. Thornton and Mr. Shepherd, of Deloraine, and Mr. Cooper, of Brandon, entered with much enthusiasm into the explorations. The settlers had previously opened two mounds about May, and had been rewarded by finding several very interesting articles.

THE EXCAVATIONS.

The theory of the writer that the mounds, so far as discovered in the Northwest, have all been for observation, as well as in some cases for other purposes, was borne out by the score examined. They are situated on headlands or points commanding a view of the valley. This was further supported by the fact that the two mounds first opened yielded no reward of bone, implement, or trinket. They were simply heaps of earth, in one case gravelly, gathered up from the surrounding area, and if they had ever been used for sepulture every trace of such had disappeared. Now, as articles of stone or metal were usually buried with the dead the conclusion seems pretty certain that these mounds were "observation mounds" and nothing more.

A RICH MOUND.

After meeting with the settlers at a most enjoyable picnic, the party hastened away to a headland on the north side of the North Antler, where a promising looking mound remained untouched. After three or four hours' hard work the "find" was gathered up and proved to be most interesting. Almost all the articles found were in company with a skeleton which was nearly entire. The skull presented no distinctive features, being rather of the dolicho-cephalic type. On account of the considerable remains already in the possession of the society, the skeleton was not brought away, but

committed to its resting place again. As the skull was raised up there fell from the forehead three flattened pieces of copper, each about $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches long by 1 inch in width, which seem to have been a frontlet fastened on the brow. A similar set of copper pieces was found on another skull in another mound opened by the settlers. The copper, as we see by subjecting it to the microscope, is native copper simply beaten out, and judging from the streaks of silver visible is certainly shown to be from Lake Superior. The list of articles obtained from the Souris mounds and now presented to you is given herewith, as time forbids a minute description of the several articles:

Metal—Three pieces copper frontlets.

Pottery—Two pottery cups; one virtually complete, the other with a small portion broken.

Organic remains—Hollow bone of bird, nine inches long, cut for whistle, and discolored green by copper. Two polished bones, probably crackers. Two flat bone implements with holes, seemingly for some tanning process. String of bone beads, nine in number, two marked. Bone conjuror's tube, with markings. Small bone implement with markings—purpose unknown. Fragment of baculite, and specimen of *Inoceramus*, now much weathered, but no doubt buried as of value for their brilliant nacreous covering. Several wampum beads. Breast ornament with perforations, evidently portion of large sea shell. Pieces of birch bark basket well preserved with regular piercings of sewing. Numerous pieces of charcoal, with evidence in mound of burning have taken place.

Stone—Two pipes from the Red pipe-stone quarry. Three round stones seemingly used for game. Two stone hammers.

DATE OF THE MOUNDS.

The Manitoba Historical Society has now obtained the result of mound opening investigations within its territory from three distinct regions.

1. Rainy River; 2. Red River; 3. Souris, hundreds of miles apart. Some twenty mounds have been pretty fully opened. The following results seem more or less firmly established:—

1. That the lands are found in fertile regions, and from which it would seem their builders were agriculturists. 2. The present races of Indians include in this area the Ojibways, Crees, and Sioux, maintain that they were not built by their ancestors. 3. A persistent tradition of small-pox is connected with the

mounds both on the Red and Rainy rivers, and there is a fear on the part of the Indians to have them opened. 4. On the Red and Souris rivers a tradition that they were built by the Mandans, or as they are incorrectly called the "Mandrills," prevails. 5. No articles of European manufacture have been found in any of these Northwestern mounds. 6. Sea shells have been found in the mounds of the three regions; stone and bone implements in them all; pottery in them all. Copper has been found in the Rainy river and Souris mounds, but not in those of Red river. 7. Evidences of fire, as of charcoal, burnt bones, etc., have been found in all.

PROBABLE THEORY.

The theory advanced by the writer in 1882 in his work on "Manitoba" is receiving in its main features confirmation from later discoveries. The probabilities are in favor of the mound builders of this region having been other than ancestors of our Indians. The connection seems almost certain with the Mandans, or "white bearded Sioux," of the Missouri river, who have nearly disappeared, but who when visited by Catlin fifty years ago were an agricultural, pottery-making, earth-dwelling tribe, among whom were many before the advent of the white man "whose skins were almost white," whom their earliest visitors declare were "a strange people, and half white," with many "from infancy to manhood and old age, with hair of a bright silvery gray." These Mandans, or, as our half-breeds call them, "Mandrills," regarded themselves as not an ancient people in their present location on the Missouri. Since Catlin visited them they have nearly all been carried away by small-pox. It does not seem unlikely that they have been the disappearing remnant of a race which faded away as did the Hochelagans in Montreal before the time of Champlain. It is worthy of remark, at any rate, that in our Northwestern mounds we have found among the copper, shell, bone and stone implements and ornaments nothing of European manufacture, which would almost certainly have been the case had the burials taken place within the last two hundred years, since which time the Indians from this region have been in the habit of going down to meet the traders at Hudson's Bay. And yet it would seem from their not building mounds, but having some of the other characters of the mound builders, that the Mandans are but connected with that race which must be looked upon as

extinct. The writer is informed by Sir William Dawson that an Indian race further south have a tradition that they intermarried with the extinct mound builders, and that their language, which is composite, is now being examined to eliminate the mound builders' element and thus we may perhaps hope for something as to this strange race from a philological direction.

THE SOURIS FORTS.

The country along the Souris was well known in early fur-trading years for its large herds of buffalo. It is believed there was a French Fort at the mouth of the Souris, on its entrance into the Assiniboine, for though there is not yet known an historic record of it, it is declared that in the time of Verandrye this river was "the centre of the establishments." We learn that before 1734 there was a French priest at this point, that he had lived there several years as a missionary, and that he had taught the Indians some short prayers in the French language, the whole of which they had not forgotten as vouched for by a fur-trader in 1804. At the beginning of this century the importance as a trading point of the mouth of the Souris river may be seen by the fact that there were here three forts, representing three rival fur trading movements, the most considerable being Brandon House, belonging to the Hudson's Bay Company, Assiniboine House, of the Northwest Fur Company of Montreal, and Fort la Souris, the port of the X. Y. or New Northwest Company, which broke off from the Northwest Company in 1796, but re-united with it in 1804.

BRANDON HOUSE.

This, in its day, important post was founded by the Hudson's Bay Company in 1794. In the year 1833 the writer visited the site of it, overlooking the Assiniboine, traced its outline distinctly on the grassy bank, and measured the size of the former enclosure and of the buildings which it had contained. It is on the property of a settler, Mr. George Moir, formerly of Beauharnois, Quebec (S. W. 19, T. 8, R. 16 W.), is about three miles from the mouth of the Souris, and about thirteen miles down the Assiniboine from the city of Brandon. The outline of the stockade was followed, and found to be 155 feet on the north, and 124 feet on the east side, which faced the river. The gate space—10 feet wide—had beside it the outline of a watch tower, and the inner space showed remains of six houses, the largest being 64 feet by 16

feet. The position was an excellent one, being on a sort of river point, and flanked toward the east by a considerable ravine. Brandon House was the point from which to Hudson's Bay and return could be made by the York boats in one season, and was hence a considerable depot. It was during the year 1816 under the charge of a Hudson's Bay Company officer, Peter Fidler, who had been in charge of Cumberland House in 1806, was useful in bringing in the Selkirk colony, who made the first survey of Red river lots, and whose library formed the basis of the old Red river library, the predecessor of our provincial library. Brandon House, was seized by the Nor'-westers in 1816, and would seem shortly after to have been abandoned, for it is not mentioned as a fort in the union of the rival fur companies in 1821.

ASSINIBOINE HOUSE.

The oldest of the three forts would seem to have been Assiniboine House, or as it was often called "Stone Indian River House." About two miles to the west of the mouth of the Souris, on the north side of the Assiniboine, may still be seen a gap in the woods, where are the ruins of this fort. It was so early as 1797, a central trading depot from which traders received stores, and went even as far south as the Missouri. The astronomer, Thompson, started from this fort on his journey to the Mandans in the year named. Assiniboine House was at this time under a Norwester trader, named John McDonell. In 1804 the trader, Harmon, visited Assiniboine House. He had, on his way from the west, stopped at a Norwester Fort, which he called Montague a la Basse—about 50 miles west of Souris mouth. This, which would in English, mean "Sand Bank Hill," seems to have been northwest of Oak Lake, and it is probably in a corrupted form the "Boss Hill" of Capt. Palliser. Assiniboine House was in charge, at the time, of Mr. Charles Chaboillez, and the trader states that the people from the other two forts were in May of that year invited to a very boisterous entertainment in Assiniboine House. In this year the Norwest and X-Y. Companies united, and Assiniboine House would seem to have been combined with it, and the headquarters of the united company at this point to have become

FORT LA SOURIS.

Across the ravine from Brandon House, and on the adjoining quarter section, are yet to be seen the ruins of what we take to have been Fort la Souris. The site is

grown over with great weeds and underbrush, but the stockade would seem to have been about 150 feet by 66 feet. Four cellars and a chimney are still traceable on the site. This fort was the rival of Brandon House in the troubles between the companies in 1816 and was in 1814 under the charge of Mr. John Pritchard, afterwards Lord Selkirk's agent, and the father of a numerous family among our Red River settlers. It was from this locality that four hundred bags of pemican, each weighing 80 or 90 pounds, were seized from the Nor'-Westers by Governor Miles Macdonell's orders, to be paid for, however, for the use of the Selkirk colony; and it was to this Fort La Souris that the loot was taken in 1816, when Brandon House was seized by the Nor'-Westers and Peter

Fidler compelled to leave it. Forty-five miles from the mouth of the Souris, seemingly near its junction with Plum Creek was situated at the beginning of this century a fort named Ash House. Of this we know little, but in subsequent years the Hudson's Bay Company maintained a winter port somewhere in this locality.

CONCLUSION.

Thus closes our sketch of the Souris River region, which in early mound building times was plainly well peopled, whose natural monuments are of continental reputation, whose mounds and intrenchments well repay study, and around whose forts far more adventure and trade centred up to Lord Selkirk's time than in the forts of Red River.